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Svetlana Has a Love Affair With India

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By Martin Ebon

The following is excerpted from "Svetlana: The Incredible Story of Stalin's Daughter," just published as a Signet paperback by the New American Library. Ebon is a faculty member at the New School for Social Research and is the author of "World Communism Today" and "Malenkov: Stalin's Successor." Mrs. Alliluyeva's own autobiographical work, "Twenty Letters to a Friend," will be published Oct. 2 by Harper & Row.

CLUTCHING HER SUITCASE, Svetlana Alliluyeva Stalina, the daughter of Joseph Stalin, entered the American Embassy in New Delhi. The Marine sergeant at the reception desk was directing two messengers. When, without a word, Mrs. Alliluyeva handed him her Soviet passport, he placed it on his desk face down. When the messengers had left, he picked up the passport and asked whether he could be of help.

"I am a Soviet citizen," Svetlana said, "and I would like to speak with someone from the American Embassy."

The Consul, George O. Huey, received Mrs. Alliluyeva in his office. When she told him that she did not wish to return to Russia, Huey telephoned Ambassador Chester Bowles, who was ill in bed. On Bowles's instructions, Embassy officials interviewed Svetlana, getting details on her trip from Moscow to India, and asked the State Department for instructions.

They had to make a choice between quick action and diplomatic caution. Was this really Stalin's daughter? She could be an impostor—a Russian propaganda trick—or even some other refugee with a mental aberration.

Technically, she did not ask for "asylum" in the United States. That would have required American authorities to advise the Indian government of her request, whether or not they planned to grant it. The Embassy's decision, in quick consultation with Washington, was to give her time to make firm plans for her future in an atmosphere outside all possible pressure.

A CIA Escort

AMBASSADOR BOWLES instructed a Russian-speaking Embassy official, Robert F. Rayle, who was also a Central Intelligence Agency staff member, to accompany Svetlana to Rome on the earliest possible flight. A U.S. visa was affixed to her Soviet passport to make her transit through Italy to Switzerland as smooth as possible. She traveled under her own name, written in the passport as "Svetlana Allilolev."

The Qantas Airlines plane reached Rome at 7:45 a.m. March 7. Svetlana was taken to a private residence. Russian Embassy staff members were at Svetlana's original Indian address in Malakankar searching for her when the radio reported her arrival in Rome.

Soviet Ambassador Benediktov called on the Indian External Affairs Ministry March 8 to protest what he regarded as a "kidnaping." That evening, Bowles visited the ministry and explained that Svetlana had voluntarily come to the embassy for a visa. Bowles then forwarded to Svetlana, in Rome, an Indian government request that she return to Delhi, thus placing the decision in her hands and underlining the fact that she had not been "kidnaped." Svetlana refused the request, assuming that it had been sent on behalf of the Soviet government.

The State Department informed the Soviet Union of Svetlana's status. It did not want her decision to hurt Washington-Moscow relations. The Russians were annoyed, not indignant; in effect, they seemed to be shrugging their shoulders at this turn of events.

Svetlana's departure from Italy for Switzerland March 10 was melodramatic. News of her presence at the airport had leaked to the press, but Italian police carefully hid Rayle in one part of the building and Svetlana in another.

Rayle boarded the plane, then be-

came alarmed. He demanded that departure be delayed until Svetlana had been brought aboard. The plane's crew would not listen to him and the ramp was pulled away from the door.

At this, Rayle placed himself inside the open door, feet set firmly apart, and argued until the crew wheeled back the ramp so that he could search the airport. No one could tell him anything. Even the police who had brought him to the airport had been kept in the dark about Svetlana's hiding place.

Finally he found her in an empty warehouse at the far end of the airport. By this time, Svetlana had become alarmed. She burst out, "If I'd known it was going to be like this, I would not have decided to come!"

There were more delays, more confusion. Rayle was forced to charter an Italian government postal plane for March 13. Svetlana was still in a high temper when she and Rayle finally buckled on their seat belts, but two hours later, when the plane taxied across the Geneva airport, she had regained her calm.

Svetlana walked away from the plane shaking her head at the questions hurled at her by reporters in German, French and English. Her Swiss visa had been granted with the specific understanding that she would not engage in political activity. She made no public statements during her stay and the press was kept away from her with vigor, although officers of the federal police in Bern were offered bribes to reveal her whereabouts.

A Mountain Hideout

THE LACK OF PUBLICITY prompted the Swiss to move Svetlana twice. They first took her to Beatenberg, a remote ski resort in the Bernese oberland, where she stayed at the Jungfraublick Hotel.

But Svetlana and her three guards remained there only two days. In spite of its remoteness, she was recognized from newspaper photos when she shopped for ski clothes at the Stahli Shop.

CONTINUED

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ORIGINAL DOCUMENT MISSING PAGE(S):

p. 2